

Making Thinking Manifest Through Think Alouds

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Experts and novices don't only differ in what they know, but in how they think; therefore, witnessing the thinking of experts (not merely the result of that thinking) can be a powerful way to gain understanding of a discipline. Think alouds—the verbalizing of one's thought process while doing a particular activity, such as reading a difficult text or responding to a challenging problem—can successfully be used for both teaching and research purposes. In this session, we will present examples of both uses, and give participants an opportunity to develop ways of using think-alouds in their courses and scholarship.

Getting Started with Think Alouds:

Calder, Lendol and Sara-Eva Carlson, "Using 'Think Alouds' to Evaluate Deep Understanding." Accessed 8.14.2012.

<http://www.sc.edu/fye/resources/assessment/essays/Calder&Carlson-9.25.02.html>

Ericsson, K. A., & H. A. Simon, *Protocol Analysis; Verbal Reports as Data* (revised edition). (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

Ericsson, K. A., & H. A. Simon, "How to Study Thinking in Everyday Life: Contrasting Think-Aloud Protocols with Descriptions and Explanations of Thinking." *Mind, Culture, & Activity*, 5/3 (1998): 178-186.

Wade, Suzanne E. "Using Think Alouds to Assess Comprehension." *The Reading Teacher* (1990): 442-451.

Weimer, Maryellen, "Think Alouds Shed Light on How Students Grapple with Content." *Faculty Focus*, January 6, 2012. Accessed 8.14.2012.

<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/think-alouds-shed-light-on-how-students-grapple-with-content>.

Wineburg, Sam, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), particularly chapters 3 and 4.

Think Aloud Text

This is an abbreviated version of a true story originally recounted by Simon Wiesenthal in his book The Sunflower.)

Simon, a Jew who was captured trying to escape Nazi persecution of the Jews, is placed in a concentration camp though he had committed no crime. He is horribly treated, underfed, overworked and in fear for his life. One day he is taken with a group of other concentration camp prisoners to a hospital to clean up the grounds. While he is cleaning, a nurse approaches him and asks if he is Jewish. When he says “yes,” she insists he follow her upstairs. She brings him to a room in which a person all covered in bandages lay on the bed and she leaves Simon in the room.

Think Aloud 1

Ann Cahill, professor of philosophy, Elon University

Q: Any questions before we start?

A: The only question is that I am in a different situation depending on what I'm reading. For example if I'm doing research I wouldn't even sit down to read something until I had thought through what problem I am working on. So I come to it with a lot as opposed to scanning the newspaper or something like that. It's not a universal position when I'm sitting down to reading. We'll see what I do when I read this.

So, I'm going to read the background information. *"This is an abbreviated version of a true story originally recounted by Simon Wiesenthal in his book The Sunflower."* So the first thing I notice is that there's a parenthesis that's lonely so maybe they meant there to be a parenthesis in the beginning of the sentence.

"Abbreviated version." So that makes me think, I wonder who did the abbreviations. I wonder what's missing. For what purpose was it abbreviated? Was there anything that was important that was missed out? I wonder if I can get my hands on the whole version of the story. *"Version of a true story."* I stop there and think wow, there's been a lot of controversy about memoirs and what constitutes the true stories. It's a first person narrative. Who says it's true? Does he say it's true and in what ways is it true?

Simon Wiesenthal, I know that name but I don't think I've ever read anything by him so I'm not thinking if I had known something about the author I'd probably have stopped there in some ways and try to remember what I had read and what I thought about what I read and what context I had read it. I have no specific associations although again I recognize the name. The book The Sunflower I have no associations with that at all. So I think this is something completely new. I am thinking – my vague associations with Simon Wiesenthal are about something about the Holocaust and World War II. I can't remember. Maybe I'm only 75% accurate about that so I'm wondering about that or if I'm confused him with something or someone else.

Okay, so *"Simon, a Jew who is captured trying to escape the Nazi persecution of Jews is placed in a concentration camp though he had committed no crime."* I would stop there and say that's kind of interesting phrasing actually. *"Though he committed no crime."* I never think of people in concentration camps as actually having committed any crime. Or if I had thought about them as criminals they would be artificial criminals in that they had broken some very unjust laws. That sentence stops me because it somewhat contradicts all my – not all but many of my assumptions about why people were placed in concentration camps. I assume people were placed in concentration camps because of identity. Perhaps because of so called subversive activity, which I would not see as criminal. So that stops me.

“He is horribly treated, underfed, overworked and in fear for his life.” Nothing about the negative connotations of those two first sentences stops me at all because it’s like yeah – concentration camps, of course. That’s not a playground. So that doesn’t stop me in my thinking.

“One day he is taken with a group of other concentration camp prisoners to a hospital to clean up the grounds.” To a hospital to clean up the grounds. That’s interesting. Really? They cared about how clean their grounds were in the concentration camps? I never thought about that. That’s interesting.

“While he is cleaning, a nurse approaches him and asks him if he is Jewish.” At this point I stop and notice the sentence structure is very simple and very narrative. It’s very simplistic, *“while this happens, this happens.”* It’s very straight forward. I’m wondering is it supposed to sound almost like a fable more than a complex memoir? Is there supposed to be something almost like a story for children or something like that. It’s just the language isn’t terribly complex.

“When he says yes, she insists that he follow her upstairs. She brings him to a room in which a person all covered in bandages lay on the bed.” That must be wrong. Lies on the bed? *“And she leaves Simon in the room.”* All right this is strange. That seems an odd turning point in the story.

Think Aloud 2

A.W., senior non-philosophy major, Elon University

A: Yes. So should I start with Simon?

Q: You’re welcome to start wherever.

A: *“Simon, a Jew who was captured trying to escape Nazi persecution of the Jews, is placed in a concentration camp though he had committed no crime.”* I’m sort of thinking, not that it’s right but his crime – his crime was probably trying to escape except – that’s an interesting sentence to me because I would consider a concentration camp to be a type of persecution and that if he’s trying to escape persecution, according to the Nazi’s that would be a crime.

“He is horribly treated, underfed, overworked and in fear for his life. One day he is taken with a group of other concentration camp prisoners to a hospital to clean up the grounds. While he is cleaning, a nurse approaches him and asks if he is Jewish. When he says yes, she insists he follow her upstairs. She brings him to a room in which a person all covered in bandages lay on the bed and she leaves Simon in the room.” That’s kind of bizarre. The underfed, overworked part is sort of essential to every concentration camp story. I never heard of this part before so it’s kind of bizarre.